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Official Records

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New York

President: Mr. Kavan ..... (Czech Republic)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Nguyen Thanh Chau (Viet Nam), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 24 (*continued*)

Culture of peace

Draft resolution (A/57/L.12)

The President: Members will recall that the General Assembly held the debate on this agenda item at its 43rd plenary meeting, on Monday, 4 November 2002, and adopted draft resolution A/57/L.9/Rev.1, which became resolution 57/6.

I give the floor to the representative of Pakistan to introduce draft resolution A/57/L.12, entitled "Religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation".

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): I have the honour to introduce, on behalf of the delegations of Bahrain, China, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the United Arab Emirates and my own delegation, the draft resolution contained in document A/57/L.12, proposing the adoption of a draft Declaration on Religious and Cultural Understanding, Harmony and Cooperation.

Since the end of the cold war, there has been a resurgence of religious and cultural intolerance in various parts of the world. The rise of xenophobia and of religious and racial intolerance and discrimination in a number of developed countries has been accompanied by the rise of anti-migrant political parties. Some of the post-cold war conflicts and disputes have been caused by religious intolerance and antipathy. In certain cases, long-standing disputes and conflicts have become increasingly linked to religious identity and have often been exacerbated by religious fervour. That has made conflict resolution more difficult.

The mutual misunderstanding and suspicion among followers of various faiths and cultures have become significantly accentuated in the aftermath of the tragic terrorist attacks of last September. Despite declarations by world leaders that the war against terrorism is not targeted against any religion or any religious or social group, discrimination, mistreatment and hate have proliferated. That has been highlighted in the Secretary-General's report (A/57/204) on measures to combat contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Unfortunately, some simplistic academic analyses and theories, projecting a clash of civilizations, have provided a veneer of respectability to the practice and profession of religious and cultural discrimination and intolerance. In recent months, some extremists have gone to the extent of attacking Islamic religious teachings and insulting revered religious personalities. Such prejudice, hate and blasphemy have

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evoked justifiable and widespread anger among the adherents of Islam.

In some States interested groups are exploiting popular misperceptions of Islam and Muslims to justify institutional and individual acts of discrimination and repression against Muslim minorities or Muslim peoples under the guise of fighting terrorism. There is a growing negative public reaction in the Islamic countries to these practices.

These dangerous patterns and practices of discrimination, intolerance and hatred on the basis of religion and culture must be addressed squarely and reversed effectively by the international community. Otherwise, they could become institutionalized and, worse, emerge as the norm in certain countries. As a result of such bigotry and bias, conflicts and disputes in various parts of the world are likely to become further exacerbated.

Religious and cultural diversity in the globalizing world needs to be seen as a vehicle for complimentary creativity and dynamism and not as the rationale for a new ideological and political confrontation. Respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of the world's cultures have to be fostered by openness, communication, freedom of thought, and knowledge. A sustained interaction between the world's religions and cultures is an indispensable avenue through which we can lift the veil of ignorance, misconception and prejudice that have become so tragically manifest in recent times.

In his address to the fifty-seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly, the President of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf, proposed the adoption of a Declaration on Religious and Cultural Understanding, Harmony and Cooperation by the General Assembly as a first step in promoting dialogue and mutual understanding. Accordingly, the Pakistani delegation, together with the sponsors, have presented the draft resolution and Declaration contained in A/57/L.12. This proposal has the endorsement, in principle, of the member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The proposal draws upon the considerable work which has already been done towards promoting mutual understanding, tolerance and dialogue among religions and cultures. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights, as well as the General Assembly, have adopted several resolutions on the subject of defamation of religions and elimination of all forms of religious intolerance. The Assembly has recognized, under resolution 56/6 of 9 November 2001, the valuable contribution which a dialogue among civilizations could make to enhance mutual awareness and understanding of the common values shared by all mankind. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's Declaration of Principles of Tolerance, adopted in 1995, calls for the promotion of tolerance through programmes and institutions in the fields of education, science, culture and communication. The Declaration on a Culture of Peace, adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, links the development of a culture of peace to the elimination of discrimination and advocates the advancement of understanding, tolerance and solidarity among all civilizations, peoples and cultures, including towards ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

Many faith-based forums, governmental and non-governmental organizations and intellectual and academic institutions, have sought to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding. These initiatives and processes need to be unified and harmonized to effectively arrest and reverse the disturbing tendencies and manifestations of religious intolerance, confrontation and discrimination.

The draft resolution contained in document A/57/L.12 is simple and procedural. While expressing concern at the resurgence of religious and cultural prejudices, and calling for the benevolent use of religious and cultural diversity, it seeks endorsement of the annexed draft Declaration.

The draft Declaration, in its preambular part, recalls the relevant resolutions and important international instruments, reaffirms State obligations, expresses concern at intolerance and prejudice and stresses the need to stamp out hate.

In its operative part, the draft Declaration calls for promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and facilitation of the participation of minorities in the political economic, social, religious and cultural life of societies. It denounces acts of intolerance, discrimination, stereotyping, racial profiling, bigotry and hatemongering in all their manifestations.

The draft Declaration welcomes the meaningful contributions of non-governmental organizations and civil society, particularly faith-based organizations, in

building a culture of tolerance, understanding and respect for other faiths and cultures. These organizations are invited to promote interfaith interaction at all levels.

The United Nations, as the most representative international forum, is best placed to coordinate and oversee international and intersocietal interaction and cooperation, as envisaged in the draft Declaration. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is requested to promote, within his mandate, implementation and follow up of the provisions of the draft Declaration and to coordinate the activities related to promotion of religious and cultural harmony, understanding and cooperation.

The sponsors of this draft resolution and Declaration in document A/57/L.12 will hold open ended informal consultations in the first week of December, with a view to evolving a document which could be approved by consensus by the Assembly.

The adoption of this draft Declaration will be a timely, authoritative and global rejection of the message of intolerance, hate and discrimination being purveyed by certain bigots and belligerents. Its adoption by the Assembly will also be an important contribution to advancing the goal of religious and cultural understanding and harmony, as well as to promoting the goals of universal peace, security and prosperity.

The President: The General Assembly will resume its consideration of agenda item 32 entitled "Information and communication technologies for development". Members will recall that the General Assembly began its debate on this agenda item at the forty-third plenary meeting on Monday, 4 November 2002.

Mr. Helg (Switzerland) (*spoke in English*): The world has become a much smaller place, due to the new technical facilities and the tremendously increased speed with which we can communicate across borders and continents. Information and communication technologies (ICT) permit us to transport signals for text, sound and pictures at the very same time. Whatever happens anywhere in the world is known immediately all over the globe, at least potentially.

It is clear, however, that ICTs have a far greater impact than simply speeding up and facilitating the exchange of information. They have transformed the way we deal with and value information and knowledge, emphasizing knowledge as structural capital of institutions and companies. Rightly, we speak today of the knowledge economy or k-economy.

ICT has the potential to bring about qualitative changes in many areas. For instance, they are having an impact on the way in which the State and other stakeholders interact — thus touching on issues of governance, democracy, human rights, public services and so on.

Just like the industrial revolution, the digital revolution also has its beneficiaries and those not yet benefiting, thus creating what is termed the digital divide. A sharp digital divide exists between the north and the south, but we should also keep in mind that there are multiple digital divides in almost all countries and societies — for instance, between the sexes, between old and young, between cultures, and between the private sector and Governments.

From the perspective of those who are not yet on the winning side of the digital divide, the consequences are major. The challenge is to turn the digital divide into digital dividends. ICT has the potential to be a powerful tool for sustainable development and poverty alleviation and to contribute towards achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. But in order for this to happen, the right enabling environments need to be put in place and considerable efforts made.

The practical question is: What are the right frameworks? What are the right efforts? Where are the entry points that will allow the impact of projects and programmes to be maximized? It is obvious that no digital dividend can be realized without the appropriate infrastructure and technology or without addressing related costs. But connectivity alone is not enough. It needs to be accompanied by capacity-building and institutional strengthening. To close in-country digital and information divides, it will be necessary to find ways to include poor and marginalized communities. Young people and women may play important roles in multiplying the impact of our efforts. Local and contextualized information, indigenous knowledge, and communication rules and rights are additional important aspects of a future global and equitable information society.

Otherwise, access to the Internet may create new divides — for example, if the countries of the South simply become consumers of the information produced and owned by the North. In our view, it is imperative to promote the production and exchange of local content, based on local cultures and languages. Thus, developing countries in particular need to formulate their own vision of an information society, taking into account the particularities of their regions and societies.

No progress will be made, however, without adequate and functioning financing mechanisms for projects aimed at bridging the digital divide. The financing models need to strike an appropriate balance between liberalization and public-service obligations to ensure that the poor will benefit as well. Appropriate policy and regulatory frameworks at the global, regional, national and local levels will also enhance the initiatives taken by Governments and individuals.

On the implementation side, the task of creating digital dividends cannot be left to Governments, donor agencies and international organizations alone; it must involve civil society, the private sector, academia and ICT professionals. All of them have important roles to play. Only a multi-stakeholder approach will ensure that all levels of society, including the grass-roots level, are shaping the efforts to bridge this divide. Similarly, there is a need for South-South and South-North information exchange and cooperation on practical experiences in using ICT for development. The voices of developing countries need to be heard and strengthened in the global policy dialogue.

The Swiss authorities recognized the importance of ICT as a tool in development work early on and tasked its Agency for Development and Cooperation with working on this matter. The Agency participated actively in the first Global Knowledge Conference in 1997 and created a special unit dedicated to "ICT for development". In 2001, the head of the Swiss Development Agency was also elected to the position of Chairman of the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP). GKP is an evolving network with a broad-based and multisectoral membership, aimed at sharing information and knowledge on the use of ICT for sustainable development. It enhances advocacy at the regional and global levels in order to make the voices of marginalized stakeholders heard; it also offers its members services through its virtual presence, the marketplace or its newsletter and publications, along with opportunities for face-to-face networking and knowledge-sharing sessions.

Based on its general engagement in the area of ICT for development, the Swiss Government is taking an active stance in the preparatory process for the World Summit on the Information Society, which will take place in Geneva in December 2003 and in Tunis in 2005. It advocates an inclusive participation that extends to civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders and supports the concept of a series of networked events. An architecture that complements the intergovernmental Summit with official platforms in parallel will enhance the possibility of all voices being heard.

Similarly, it champions a holistic approach to the thematic discussions. The Summit needs to go beyond telecommunications-related technical issues in order to move closer to an equitable and global information society that is based on shared values and cultural diversity. The Summit must explore and recommend practical steps and concrete measures encouraging poverty-focused uses of ICT for development and empowerment.

The beginnings of the new ICT and Internet age were marked by a spirit of endless possibilities, freedom of communication, by the conviction that sharing information and knowledge is beneficial to all and by the use of such phrases as "sharing makes us richer" or "knowledge is not only renewable, it grows with use." We must all work to extend these benefits to everyone and fully to realize the potential of ICT to alleviate poverty, create jobs and invest in a future that offers perspectives.

Mr. Lee Ho-jin (Republic of Korea): At the outset, I would like to express my delegation's satisfaction at the constructive contribution of the Meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies (ICT) for development held in June. As reflected by the high-level participation of stakeholders representing the international community, the private sector and civil society from all over the world, the Meeting fulfilled one of its primary goals of promoting awareness and raising the political profile of the multifaceted issues surrounding ICT. We sincerely hope that the international community will make efforts to sustain and utilize this momentum until the upcoming World

Summit on the Information Society, to be held in 2003 and 2005.

As the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session stated in his summary of the Meeting, the need to effectively integrate ICTs into development in a timely manner is urgent, as every passing day the digital divide grows wider and becomes more difficult to bridge. In that regard, my delegation would like to commend the ICT Task Force and the Digital Opportunities Task Force for their efforts to engage intergovernmental and international organizations, as well as the private sector and civil society, in promoting digital opportunities. Indeed, if we are to achieve progress in tackling this challenging issue, we must pool resources and knowledge across all sectors of society in a collaborative and cooperative approach.

An effective partnership between those countries with and those without ICT infrastructure, experience and knowledge is one essential element in ensuring that all the countries of the world have an equal opportunity to benefit from ICTs. In that regard, the Republic of Korea remains committed to sharing its unique experience and expertise with developing nations.

As my Minister of Information and Communications stated at the meeting in June, the Republic of Korea itself took advantage of digital opportunities to rise from a newly industrialized developing nation to the world's twelfth-largest economy and a global leader in ICTs. By enacting a comprehensive information promotion plan, the Korean Government made ICTs a national priority, building an ICT infrastructure and adopting programmes that integrated ICTs into all regions, sectors and socio-economic classes of Korean society.

As my country has learned first-hand, superior human resources are crucial to the development of a knowledge-based economy. Indeed, the Republic of Korea owes much of its development to its highly educated workforce. Acknowledging this, the Korean Government has continuously implemented human resources development programmes so as to produce a generation of ICT-savvy Koreans. The Government's efforts to foster creativity and growth in the private sector by promoting market principles such as competition, liberalization, deregulation and privatization have been another key. A third strategy that the Korean Government has adopted is to give priority to the inducement of foreign direct investment and international cooperation. As a result of its active pursuit of foreign direct investment, Korea has benefited from an influx of capital and advanced technology, as well as of improved management skills and better jobs. Moreover, the Korean Government continues to actively seek opportunities for international cooperation through ICT-related global and regional initiatives.

Since ICTs have become an increasingly important tool in the development process, the Republic of Korea has joined in the efforts of the international community to help bridge the digital divide with human resources and infrastructure development projects in the field of ICTs, through both bilateral and multilateral channels, such as the United Nations regional commissions.

Utilizing a trust fund, Korea has contributed to the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The Korean Government is currently implementing various projects, such as the establishment of regional information and telecommunications centres and ICT human resources training programmes, and the creation of cyber-education networks, particularly in Africa and in developing countries elsewhere. Since 1991, we have invited about 1,200 foreign trainees in the ICT field to participate in human resources development programmes in Korea and have dispatched more than 600 Korean ICT experts and volunteers to implement programmes abroad.

My delegation would like, however, to underscore that partnerships among those countries, with or without ICT resources, are only one of the keys to successfully bridging the digital divide. The active participation of the private sector and the engagement of civil society are also essential to, inter alia, promoting economic growth, ensuring social progress, bolstering the fight against global pandemics and reducing gender inequalities through digital opportunity. Moreover, my delegation strongly supports the exploration of regional coordination and South-South cooperation, by which the developing nations would be able to share valuable experience and best practices.

As the ICT industry develops, the international community has the obligation not only to spread digital opportunities such as e-commerce and e-government, but also to prevent and counter the misuse of such opportunities in the new arena of cybercrime. My delegation strongly believes that the international community should collaborate by exchanging information, establishing a legal framework and developing expertise and technology to counter this new security threat.

In closing, I would like to express the hope of my delegation that the United Nations will continue to play its crucial role in bringing the key stakeholders together to promote awareness of ICTs and to develop and implement strategies for bridging the digital divide. We are confident that the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society in 2003 and 2005 will provide a significant opportunity for such multi-stakeholder collaboration and cooperation. For its part, the Republic of Korea remains committed to these goals and looks forward to sharing its experience and working collaboratively to create digital opportunity for all.

Mr. Mizukami (Japan): It is a pleasure for me to speak on agenda item 32, "Information and communication technologies for development", at this plenary meeting. Japan attaches great importance to promoting international cooperation in the area of information and communication technologies (ICTs). We have actively availed ourselves of all the opportunities that have been presented for further discussion on this subject. At the United Nations, the issue was first addressed at the high-level segment of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in 2000. We would also like to mention the meeting of the General Assembly devoted to information and communication technologies for development. For two full days, more than 50 Member States engaged in a very constructive discussion on the opportunities and challenges posed by the development of ICTs.

We are witnessing the most important structural transformation in the world since the industrial revolution. Although at times the information technology (IT) industry may be affected by economic conditions, this is a phenomenon that cannot be reversed. For years to come, ICTs will remain a fundamental, if not indispensable, infrastructure. In that regard, it is important to create an information society in which everyone receives the full benefit of ICTs and uses those technologies as a basis for development. ICTs must serve as a means of accelerating development, not widening the economic gap.

In order to receive the full benefits of ICTs, we also need to consider the issue of cybersecurity. Once connected, no person or country is immune from the threat of cyberterrorism. As the importance of information and networks increase, so does the potential damage caused by cyberterrorism. The cost to society may be serious enough to adversely affect the development effort. For that reason, my Government actively involved itself in the drafting of the Guidelines for the Security of Information Systems and Networks: Towards a Culture of Security adopted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and joined the United States in sponsoring draft resolution A/C.2/57/L.10, introduced in the Second Committee and entitled "Creation of a global culture of cybersecurity," which is based on the OECD Guidelines. We would like to call upon all Member States to support that very important draft resolution, which addresses an issue of critical importance to every country in the world.

While we actively engage in discussions in the interest of exchanging views and raising awareness, we are also committed to assisting through action on the ground. Japan has made both bilateral and multilateral contributions, emphasizing cooperation with international organizations. Its $5 million contribution to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) thematic trust fund for ICTs is an example of its multilateral cooperation in this area. The fund, financed mostly by Japan, enables the UNDP to make full use of its expertise in order to draft and implement projects, with the objective of realizing the Millennium Development Goals.

The World Summit on the Information Society will be held in 2003 in Geneva and in 2005 in Tunis. We commend the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which from the outset has played an important role in this area. Japan is determined to continue its support for the Summit, which takes many forms and is provided at several levels. From 13 through 15 January 2003, my Government will host the Asian Regional Conference for the World Summit on the Information Society. Through this ministerial preparatory meeting in Tokyo, the countries of the

region can discuss their interests and views and shape them into proposals for the Summit. The Conference will afford Summit participants a good opportunity to directly exchange views and deepen their understanding of the issues. Invitations have been sent to Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) member States in the region and to international organizations, and the business sector and civil society are also expected to participate. We welcome the active cooperation of the United Nations system, especially the co-sponsors, namely, ESCAP, ITU, UNDP, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

We have repeatedly heard that ICTs are only a means and not an end. While we agree that this is so, we should not mistakenly draw the conclusion that they are of any less importance. Without the means, we cannot achieve the goals that we have agreed on. We therefore should give serious consideration as to how we can use this tool most effectively. We hope that the World Summit on the Information Society and its preparatory process will allow us to do that.

Mr. Alcalay (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Just a few days ago, from 27 to 30 October 2002, in accordance with the mandate of the first South Summit of heads of State or Government of the Group of 77, we held, in the city of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, the first Group of 77 High-Level Conference on Science and Technology. There, thanks to the support of our host, Government representatives and scientists from the developing world gathered together to meet on three themes that are of fundamental importance for the developing world: information and communication technologies (ICTs); biotechnology; and the supply of drinking water.

Since we are dealing today with the question of information and communication technologies, allow me, on behalf of the Group of 77, to make a few brief comments concerning the conclusions reached by the representatives of the countries of our Group, which will be issued as an official document of the United Nations. The Dubai Declaration will contribute to the promotion of science and technology in the South.

In the Declaration, we reaffirm our commitment to implement specific, concrete plans of action at the national and international levels, with a view to promoting and developing knowledge and technology in the South, and to promoting the central role of the United Nations in removing the barriers faced by the developing world in acquiring knowledge and technology, particularly in the area of ICTs, which can enable us to promote development.

Despite the fact that it focuses on South-South cooperation, the Dubai Declaration recognizes that cooperation with developed countries is needed in order to achieve the necessary level of scientific and technological development, as mentioned by previous speakers, particularly the representative of Korea, who stressed not only South-South cooperation but also the development of South-South-North cooperation.

For that reason, it is a great honour for me to say on behalf of the Group of 77 how happy we are that the General Assembly is considering the question of information and communication technologies. But we believe it necessary for the Assembly to move towards productive, effective action that would enable us between next year and 2005 to come up with a concrete strategy to further develop this cooperation.

The rapid scientific and technological advances of recent years, above all in sectors such as micro-electronics, biotechnology and information technology, should give impetus to efforts to achieve world economic and social development, particularly for the poorest countries. ICTs are a factor that, if used to promote the Millennium Development Goals, will clearly enable us to provide hundreds of millions of the world's people with the possibility of promoting equality in the field of growth and economic development, reducing disparities between developed and developing countries, and facilitating access to knowledge and education at all levels of society so as to enable all individuals and local communities to fulfil their potential and their aspirations and to build their capacity in order to strengthen well-informed decision-making. This is people-oriented technology for everyone.

The majority of the world's population still lives in poverty. Millions of our fellow human beings still do not enjoy the benefits of information and communication technologies. The tremendous potential of such technologies largely eludes developing countries. Our countries must free themselves from technological dependence in order to find ways to acquire such technologies for our benefit and knowledge. Freeing ourselves from that dependence should also enable us to produce goods and services for

the benefit of our peoples, and make it possible to apply appropriate technological solutions to our individual problems. We are in a position to do this, if we so chose.

Overcoming the disparity between developing and developed countries in order to produce scientific and technical knowledge for the benefit of social, economic and political development is one of the main problems facing the international community. That enormous digital divide, which is growing daily, must be bridged so as to direct knowledge to better the peoples and the economies of the majority of developing countries. We therefore need urgent action and concrete solutions that involve not only the Governments we represent here in the General Assembly but also multilateral institutions, donors, the private sector, the scientific community and civil society. In other words, we must involve every component of society in this great endeavour for the future of our peoples.

Information and communication technologies must be considered in the broad context of the priorities and structures of developing countries. Without a common and appropriate vision and timely international cooperation to gradually reduce the digital divide that has so often been referred to in the Assembly, the ICT revolution will continue increasingly to marginalize the peoples of the world, and the economies of the majority of developing countries will increasingly become more dependent and less able to overcome the challenges of an unequal world.

For the Group of 77 and China it is essential that we attain concrete results from the various international initiatives adopted to strengthen capacity and to allow developing countries to benefit from the opportunities provided by information and communication technologies. That means we must act, and not just adopt rhetorical declarations. Initiatives should provide appropriate conditions to create international action leading to development. This is not a matter of science and technology for their own sake. Instead, development must be the objective of this debate, as was recognized in the ministerial declaration of the 2000 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council and in that Council's 2001 coordination segment. That was also mandated by the General Assembly at its meeting held on 17 and 18 June 2002 to consider information and communication technologies.

The creation of the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force represents a recognition of the existence of the digital divide between developed and developing countries. Accordingly, the work done by the Task Force to make progress in this process is an effective and proper contribution towards the future of this effort. I would like to stress the fact that this subject has had an important influence on the work of the Committee on Information — and I mention this because my country has the honour to chair that important Committee. Yet the search for a strategy to effectively disseminate information on the work of the Organization, and the debates that have taken place in the Department of Public Information, make it possible to properly include the element of coordinated action as we chart a new path for the United Nations. They have also made it possible to call for an ICT revolution in the very heart of the Organization itself, so as to enable us to adapt to the huge transformation that our peoples and leaders are calling for.

We look forward to the World Summit on the Information Society, which will be held at Geneva in December 2003 and at Tunis in 2005. The Group of 77's Dubai Conference recognized the enormous possibilities that these meetings and the Summit will open for the developing world: in cooperation with developed countries, they will be able to continue to develop the basis for a strategy for South-South cooperation — yet one that is geared towards South-South-North cooperation.

The United Nations and other international organizations have reiterated the importance of information and communication technologies as powerful tools to facilitate the integration of the countries that make up the United Nations. The time has come for us to meet our commitments in this regard and move ahead with the great revolution in information and communication technologies on behalf of the poorest in the world and for the benefit of all mankind.

Mr. Fall (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): It is always a great honour — and an intimidating enterprise — to take the floor after the representative of Venezuela, who has just stated the position of the Group of 77 and China. I would like to congratulate him on the vivid

statement he has just made, as well as to say that my delegation fully associates itself with the position he has just set out.

Allow me, on behalf of the delegation of Senegal, to express our sincere thanks to the President for his excellent initiative to include in our agenda the very topical subject of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for development. Just a few months ago, on 17 and 18 June, in accordance with resolution 56/258, the General Assembly convened a memorable meeting on information and communication technologies for development. Also under consideration were reducing the digital divide and taking advantage of the possibilities offered by the digital revolution in the new information society. President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal was the main speaker at that meeting, as the coordinator of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) programme in the strategic sector of new information and communication technologies.

The major socio-economic disparities that regulate access to information are particularly alarming. The perverse overlapping of current trends leads us to fear that the digital divide will increase even more, particularly between the elite of the privileged users of the information highways and the rank and file of digital illiterates who are relegated to the very back of the virtual revolution. Unfortunately, some data collected by the International Telecommunications Union make for enlightening reading. There are 83 countries with only 10 telephone lines per one hundred people, and 25 countries with fewer than one per hundred. Sixty-one Member States have less than one Internet navigator for every one hundred people. Then there is the cost of Internet access, which is five cents a minute in Switzerland, for example, compared to $1 in Africa, which is 20 times more expensive than in Europe.

That is why African leaders, seeking urgently to find sustainable solutions to the continent's underdevelopment, have made the information and technology sector a priority of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). They believe strongly that by facilitating Africa's integration into the new information society, our continent will be better able to manage development, trade, investment and finance, while at the same time working more effectively to eradicate poverty. That, of course, involves a titanic struggle to overcome ignorance and illiteracy.

The right path to meet that challenge can be summed up in a single word: education. African heads of State are well aware of that. They realize that the development of human resources and the flourishing of creative capacities are certainly a determining factor in economic growth because of the multiplier effects on the production processes.

We also need to ensure the proper implementation of carrier strategies and policies, with a view to promoting better education that can produce competent officials who can take advantage of all the opportunities of the digital universe. In that context, the support of the United Nations is essential, particularly with regard to implementing the decisions and recommendations set out in the Plan of Action for Education adopted at the Dakar Conference. In order to do that, we need to act together to break the vicious circle of conflicts and endemic poverty, support the promotion of digital opportunities in Africa and in the least developed countries, help Africa evaluate its priority needs and implement effective strategies so that we can better profit from the introduction of new information and communications technologies in development objectives.

The Government of Senegal early recognized the immense stakes of the digital world and the extraordinary progress made in ICT. It has promoted the establishment of cybercafes in many cities and the proliferation of communication centres in the country's most remote areas. It has also embarked successfully on laying high-capacity underwater fibre-optic links that now connect Senegal to a number of African countries and to Europe and Asia as well. It is that same concern for "digital opening up" that recently led the Senegalese State to launch an ambitious technology park project, or "cybervillage", on the outskirts of the capital, Dakar, with highly competitive telecommunication infrastructures for businesses and young people in the continent who wish to participate in the new economy.

As part of that process, my country, with the valuable support of Microsoft, has established a programme for very young children that is designed to provide early training in computer use to children between the ages of 2 and 6, whose specific needs will be accommodated in the framework of the ministry established by the Government just two days ago. In the same vein, the University of the African Future, which is to be set up in Senegal, will, in real time and

by satellite, provide teaching targeted at a large number of African students.

It is through such initiatives, which must be intensified, and thanks to better mastery of ICT, that the African peoples will be able to retake the place that has always belonged to them in the alliance of continents. That is why the essential support of the United Nations and our development partners is expected, in keeping with the wish expressed at the conference held in Dakar in April 2002 on partnership with the private sector for the financing of NEPAD.

Members will recall that at the end of the Dakar Conference, organized in the wake of the Monterrey Conference, Africa sought massive support from the international community to carry out a number of projects, some of the most important being the following: the establishment of Intranet networks at the subregional and pan-African levels to circulate audio-visual information, long-distance education and the development of human resources, harmonization of the regulatory framework for African telecommunications to facilitate foreign investment, development of infrastructures and improvement of connectivity, promotion of cultural industries, assembling industrial units to produce computer and telecommunications equipment, and establishment of a world fund for ICT to help Africa reduce its digital deficiency.

In preparing for the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Geneva from 10 to 12 December 2003 and in Tunis in 2005, it would be useful to have a meeting, perhaps next year in Dakar, between, on the one hand, President Abdoulaye Wade, coordinator of the NEPAD ICT programme, and, on the other hand, the Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Africa and NEPAD, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Information and Communication Technologies, the Chairman of the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force, the Chairman of the Digital Opportunities Task Force, the Chairman of the Open-ended Ad Hoc Working Group on Informatics, the High Representative of the Secretary-General for the Least Developed Countries, and all development partners and international or pan-African authorities in that vital sector.

The Senegalese head of State continues to emphasize that ICT assumes a superior democracy in which everyone advances at the same rate, within the context of globalization and of the development process. Therefore, it is through a coherent, holistic and voluntary approach that the United Nations will be able to address the enormous cybernetic challenge so that everyone — men and women, rich and poor — can take an active part in this fascinating digital adventure that is already showing us a glimmer of the humanist civilization of the virtual at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Mr. Margarian (Armenia): The extremely fast-paced developments in technology have led us to focus attention on its immense possibilities and to predict the arrival of what has variously been termed "the global village", "the information economy", "the knowledge economy" and "the information society".

As we move into the third millennium, it is of the utmost importance to understand and to influence the fundamental changes brought about by the communication and information revolution. In the contemporary world, productivity and competitiveness are characterized as being based on the generation of new knowledge, know-how and access to and processing of information. Information technologies, telecommunications and many other fields of technological innovation offer new opportunities to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to target development projects. It is crucial to replace bureaucratic systems of organization and management with new organizational forms. The landlocked countries are in particular need to exploit the expanded opportunities of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in this regard.

We all agree that there is a special need to address the digital divide and to put information and communication technologies at the service of development, which requires particular attention from the United Nations. In this respect, we welcome the establishment of the United Nations ICT Task Force, which reflects the readiness of the United Nations to commit to these problems.

We expect the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), to be held in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005, to find ways and means of bridging the digital divide and to make the vast opportunities offered by information technologies available to all.

We believe that international agreements and declarations relating to information technologies development must be complemented by practical work to bridge and prevent the digital divide with a sustained commitment to technical assistance and capacity-building to the countries that have committed themselves to competition and market-based economies.

In December 2000, the Government of Armenia declared the development of information technologies, a sector in which Armenia has developed considerable know-how and expertise, to be a main priority for fostering the economy, creating jobs and raising education standards.

The Armenian Government has now launched an innovative e-governance project. The flagship of the programme is an e-visa system, which was introduced this October with financial assistance from the Office of the United Nations Development Programme in Yerevan. Anyone around the world with access to the Internet may apply for an entry visa online. Thus, Armenia appears to be among the first countries in the world to offer electronic visas. This is the starting point of the programme, which will put other consular services online as well. A draft law on e-documents and e-signatures has been worked out to promote e-commerce in Armenia.

Web-based commerce has the potential to improve productivity both in national and the global economies, making existing industries more efficient while creating new industries that we have not yet imagined. A number of techno-parks and powerful business incubators, established with the assistance of the World Bank and of Armenian communities abroad, are currently successfully operating in Armenia.

New legal frameworks and standards are being set up to promote the development and interconnection of national information infrastructures. The Government is working on the parallel regulatory changes necessary to facilitate and foster further information technology development in the country. One of our strategic programmes is the preparation of specialists of the new generation. In this regard, the Information Technologies Institute, recently established under the auspices of the European Union-initiated technical assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States and Georgia programme, is of great importance for the preparation of highly qualified specialists not only for Armenia, but for the countries of the region as well.

ICTs have become a major consolidating factor in promoting the processes of regional cooperation. Armenia is pleased that there is political will in many developed countries to support and encourage these processes. We highly appreciate the various European Union initiatives in the field of information technology development in the South Caucasus region. The European Union's Caucasus Information Technology Initiative has been launched recently. This initiative aims at supporting the South Caucasus' integration into the global information community.

The complexity and interconnectedness of today's world problems defy traditional explanations and solutions and require a completely new approach. We believe that the imaginative use of emerging technologies and the creation of cooperative approaches are able to accelerate development and reverse the most worrisome trends in various regions. The spread of information and communication technologies may become, among other things, the consolidating factor for confidence-building, promoting stability and security in many regions of the world.

Mrs. Bose (India): The agenda item "Information and communication technologies for development" is of great importance to developing countries, as they are keen to benefit from information and communication technologies (ICTs) in their struggle to eradicate poverty and to achieve sustained economic growth.

ICTs, the new paradigm of the twenty-first century, have the potential to create new approaches to development, particularly through the possibility of leapfrogging stages of technological development. At the Millennium Summit, our heads of Government and State recognized the tremendous opportunities offered by ICTs and agreed to work together to ensure that the benefits of new technologies, especially ICTs, are available to all.

Bridging the digital divide — the uneven diffusion of ICTs — between and within nations is now a global objective. Given the pace of the revolutionary changes in the field of ICTs, the divide widens every day, demonstrating the imperative of concerted action by the international community as a matter of the utmost urgency. At the same time, it is important to reach a consensus, which unfortunately we have not yet

reached, on how to adequately harness the potential of ICTs to assist developing countries in their efforts to secure a better standard of living for their people.

The United Nations has a crucial role to play in making ICTs work for the promotion of the development efforts of developing countries. The holding of the special meeting of the General Assembly this June was significant in promoting awareness. The United Nations system now needs to work on concrete programmes that provide technical and financial support for capacity-building to developing countries. The ICT Task Force, we are confident, will contribute to this process.

The World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in two phases — in 2003 in Switzerland and in 2005 in Tunisia — should focus on how to achieve the objective of ICTs for all. We hope that the meeting will build a consensus at the global level on how to increase access to ICTs, use ICTs for development and secure a commitment at the political level to act in concert on the basis of mutual benefit. We believe that the involvement of major groups and relevant stakeholders will contribute greatly to our efforts to achieve the goal of ICT for all.

We in India have embarked on attaining the target of information technology for all at the national level by 2008, so that the benefits of this technology reach the common man even in the most remote parts of the country. In its strategy towards that end, India will focus on developing the necessary information technology infrastructure and enhancing human capacities. We expect, in the next five years, to have 200 to 300 million telephone users and 300 to 400 million Internet users. This will require large investments in the areas of, inter-alia, optical fiber cables, Internet service providers, Internet data centres and mobile telephony. We have undertaken initiatives towards that end, and we are working with stakeholders and the private sector to make access to information technology affordable and user friendly.

Some specific measures being pursued in India include a mass campaign for information technology awareness, the establishment of information technology kiosks, the promotion of information technology education in all schools and colleges, the establishment of national- and State-level digital libraries and the promotion of information technology for agriculture and integrated rural development, including through wired villages. We are also committed to e-governance, which brings people and Government even closer to each other. The first step we took was the posting by all Government departments of information on their activities on the World Wide Web. The second was to move to a stage of interaction where inputs are sought from our people on Government programmes and initiatives, with a view to their further improvement. The third stage, which is now under implementation, is to allow for transactions between the Government and the people to be made electronically.

We also believe that e-commerce is another area that has tremendous scope. Information technology has broken geographical barriers, which opens up opportunities for small- and medium-scale enterprises to extend their geographical reach and secure new customers in ways formerly restricted to much larger firms. We will, however, have to address the challenges of providing a sound legal basis to those transactions. We must also address issues of security.

The information technology industry is income-generating and can contribute to the economic growth of a country. The gross annual revenue of the information technology software and services industry in India during the fiscal year 2000-2001 was over $8.2 billion. Exports contributed $6.2 billion to that figure, an increase of 55 per cent in dollar terms over the previous year. The Indian software industry currently accounts for 2 per cent of our gross domestic product. That figure is projected to increase to 7.7 per cent by 2008. Its contribution to exports is presently 14 per cent, and is projected to increase to 35 per cent by 2008. The performance of Indian industry derives from its quality and its delivery of high-end requirements. A survey of giant transnational corporations reveals that one out of every four outsources its critical software requirements from India. India also has the predominant share of companies to have received the Software Engineering Institute's capability maturity model level 5 certification of industry recognition for the highest standards of quality in software development.

We subscribe to the view that it is necessary to develop human resources through education, including secondary and tertiary education, in order to benefit from ICT. The social benefits of primary education are widely acknowledged, and it is therefore a worldwide goal. In today's technological world, secondary and tertiary education have become equally important.

Similarly, the role of vocational training centres or information technology institutions that provide the specific skills demanded by the market is pivotal. It is the development of such skills and capabilities that attracts private investment, including foreign direct investment, and, in turn, contributes to economic growth and poverty reduction. The growth of the information technology industry in India is due, to a large extent, to the availability of a large pool of skilled manpower. Our information technology training industry has gross annual revenues of $400 million, and an annual growth rate of about 40 per cent. We therefore again strongly commend efforts by the United Nations system, particularly its funds and programmes, in providing technical assistance and capacity-building.

We recognize the important role that can be played by ICT in promoting development. Our own experience attests to this. We, however, also subscribe to the view that ICT alone cannot solve the problems of poverty and under-development. It is also our view that a judicious blend of emphasis on provision of basic social, educational and health services, as well as on the development of both brick and click industries, is required in any strategy for sustained human development and poverty reduction.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 32. The Assembly has thus concluded its consideration of agenda 32.

Agenda item 42

Follow-up to the outcome of the twenty-sixth special session: implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS

Report of the Secretary-General (A/57/227 and Corr.1)

The Acting President: In connection with this item, the President of the General Assembly has asked me to announce that he has appointed Mr. Enrique Manalo, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations, as facilitator to negotiate a draft resolution on this item.

Ms. Reds (Norway): HIV/AIDS is the worst pandemic in human history. HIV/AIDS is frustrating development efforts. It is undermining educational programmes, health systems, public administration and agriculture — the entire fabric of society. It is reversing decades of development gains. An extraordinary effort will be needed by all development partners to achieve the goal of halting and reversing HIV/AIDS and other major diseases. And a great deal of work must be done before 2015 if we are to fulfil the promises made in the Millennium Declaration. Business as usual is not an option. With the adoption by the General Assembly last year of the United Nations Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (S-26/2, annex), the world community demonstrated its readiness to march. The Declaration sets out a number of concrete and time-bound goals. We know where we are going, and what tools to use to combat the epidemic. Now we must translate our political commitment into action.

The Declaration of Commitment has been an important framework and instrument for creating awareness about the epidemic. The report of the Secretary-General on progress towards the implementation of the Declaration (A/57/227) points out the achievements that have been gained and the challenges that remain.

There is cause for optimism, especially in the fields of leadership, partnership and resource mobilization. More and more countries are adopting national plans and strategies to combat HIV/AIDS. However, the results at the country level are not satisfactory. There is still a long way to go before national strategies are truly multisectoral. Many countries report difficulties in involving a range of sectors. The HIV/AIDS response is still, to a large extent, centred in the ministries of health.

We encourage the UNAIDS secretariat and sponsors to assist countries in integrating HIV/AIDS programmes into their poverty reduction strategies and sector-wide approaches. It is also essential that all stakeholders coordinate their work to ensure that efforts to combat HIV/AIDS at the national level are integrated into national plans and strategies.

Too many of the efforts against AIDS are still being conducted as small-scale interventions. We need more nationwide comprehensive programmes. Many prevention programmes have been shown to work, but they are still confined to small geographical areas. The time has come to apply good practices on a much larger scale.

The main reason why this has not been done is reported to be a lack of resources. Many countries report that their high debt burden prevents them from allocating sufficient resources to fight HIV/AIDS. We strongly encourage the donor community to step up its funding to combat the pandemic. We urge all partners involved to ensure the effective implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative.

The resources allocated to HIV/AIDS have increased by 50 per cent since 2001. This increase has come from developing countries' own budget allocations, donor nations, multilateral allocations, civil society and private sector funds. But this is still less than one third of the resources needed to fund the global response to HIV/AIDS. According to UNAIDS estimates, $10.5 billion is needed annually. By 2007 this figure will have risen to $15 billion. We strongly encourage the donor community to step up its funding to combat the pandemic.

One of the instruments for raising the necessary resources is the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Although the Fund is not part of the United Nations, Norway encourages United Nations agencies and the Fund to continue to cooperate closely. The Fund should make use of existing mechanisms and expertise of the United Nations system. The roles of UNAIDS and the Global Fund are complementary and mutually reinforcing: one provides expertise and technical assistance, whereas the other is purely a financing instrument. The United Nations family has vast country and programme experience, which will be extremely valuable to the Fund when identifying which programmes are ready to be scaled up. We are also concerned about the need for the United Nations family to strengthen and better coordinate its efforts at the country level, not least with the relevant national authorities, especially as a result of the establishment of the Fund.

Education is the only known vaccine against HIV/AIDS — at least for the time being. Respect for the right to information and reproductive health care is essential if we are to halt the spread of the epidemic. Lack of knowledge kills thousands of people every day. In the fight against HIV/AIDS, we must break down the walls of silence and denial. The price of not doing so has become too high. Prevention and care programmes are being hampered by the discrimination and stigmatization that surround the epidemic. We must speak up against this.

The Global Fund does not cover research and development. However, we have committed ourselves to increasing global efforts to develop and put into use new, efficient prevention tools such as HIV-preventive vaccines and microbicides.

We have also committed ourselves to implementing strategies for creating supportive environments for orphans and other children affected by HIV/AIDS. But more than half of the countries that responded to the Secretary-General's questionnaire lack strategies to cope with the steadily increasing number of children who are orphaned as a result of the epidemic. Donor countries and civil society must support national Governments' efforts to cope with this grave problem.

For a long time the international fight against HIV/AIDS was exclusively concerned with prevention. This has now changed. Part of this change came with the Declaration adopted at the General Assembly's special session on HIV/AIDS in the summer of 2001. The Declaration recognized care and treatment, including anti-retroviral therapy as a central tool in the global campaign against HIV/AIDS. There is no doubt that access to medical treatment is a legitimate demand. An effective HIV/AIDS response also requires giving people who are already infected the support, care and treatment they need.

Although the cost of HIV/AIDS drugs has declined sharply during the past few years, it remains too high for most people in the developing countries. We must continue our efforts to ensure that the developing countries gain access to inexpensive drugs produced under licence, and that the pharmaceutical industry assumes its share of the responsibility. At the same time, local health care systems must be strengthened so that they can offer an effective chain of health-related services designed to meet the needs of individuals, regardless of their HIV status or the stage of infection.

The importance of the General Assembly's special session on HIV/AIDS should not be underestimated. It marked a definite turning point in how we perceive and respond to the epidemic. We have agreed on the strategies for combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The next step is to turn our good intentions into action. We must ensure that we follow up the various declarations and summits in a consistent manner. We would encourage the General Assembly to

devote a full day of next year's session to a discussion of the implementation of the Assembly's HIV/AIDS Declaration of Commitment.

Ms. Marzec-Boguslanska (Poland): It is a great honour for me to address this Assembly today, during this meeting devoted to the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. As the time has come to assess the outcome of enhanced coordination and intensification of our efforts, I appreciate having this opportunity to describe activities being carried out in Poland aimed at putting our efforts and commitments into practice.

Combating AIDS in Poland is carried out in accordance with its National Programme for HIV Prevention and Care for People Living with HIV/AIDS. The Minister of Health, on the advice of the Country Coordinating Mechanism on AIDS and non-governmental organizations, especially those participating in the National Programme, sets up the National Plan and determines the overall framework of Poland's national policy on HIV/AIDS.

Implementation of the national policy is accomplished through intersectoral cooperation and implementation of the national plan. The Minister of Health acts through his adviser on AIDS and drug addiction, with the National AIDS Centre playing a leading role on his behalf. The National AIDS Centre, being an agency of the central Government, coordinates all activities concerning HIV/AIDS control in Poland and cooperates with other countries, in particular with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The national plan includes the most important instruments for HIV/AIDS prevention and therapy and aims mainly at the prevention of HIV infection, formulating an appropriate stance based on contemporary knowledge in the field, on human rights and on the provision of integrated care through the national programme. One of the national programme's priorities is reducing the prevalence of HIV, with a view to curbing the spread of HIV infection in Poland through: education of society, with particular emphasis on the education of youth — since approximately 64 per cent of HIV-positive people are under the age of 29; carrying out prevention activities among people in the groups at greater risk of HIV infection; encouraging people to take HIV diagnostic tests; permanently monitoring safety standards for blood and blood-replacing agents; and preventing diseases that favour HIV transmission. Subsequent actions target particularly vulnerable groups.

The development of a network of anonymous and confidential testing in Poland is a crucial part of prevention activities. Model testing centres began operation in Poland in 1997, offering anonymous, confidential and free testing, as well as pre-test and post-test counselling.

In the context of HIV/AIDS, drug abuse is becoming an increasingly serious problem. Methadone-based substitution therapy has started as a pilot project. At present, there are 11 such programmes, involving approximately 800 people.

In order to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission, pregnant women are encouraged by family doctors to take an HIV test on a voluntary basis. Anti-retroviral prophylactics, since the very beginning of their use, have been offered to HIV-positive pregnant women. There are a number of programmes, implemented mainly by the Institute of Mother and Child Health in cooperation with the National AIDS Centre and non-governmental organizations. Accordingly, the rate of vertical transmission has decreased from 23 per cent to 0.3 per cent.

With respect to HIV/AIDS prevention in the workplace, an inventory of the existing situation is being carried out in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme in order to prepare guidelines concerning HIV/AIDS and human rights in the workplace, addressed to employees, employers and civil society institutions.

Since 1990, all patients covered by the national programme have had access to specialized treatment. There are 14 State reference centres for AIDS therapy in Poland. Currently, many initiatives have been implemented in cooperation with Eastern European countries.

It should also be noted that psychological and social support for HIV-positive patients and their families is provided by ensuring support for hospitalized persons and by providing the opportunity to participate in group, individual, marital and family therapy. Special attention is given to HIV-positive children and to those living in families with HIV/AIDS problems.

With respect to the issue of HIV/AIDS and human rights, Polish law lacks rules and regulations on the issue of HIV/AIDS in the context of human rights. Despite some cases of a discriminatory reaction by society in the early years, when HIV infections first appeared in Poland, social pressure did not result in legislative changes. In addition to the increase in social awareness and HIV/AIDS social education, there seems to be greater tolerance and less stigmatization in the workplace. People who are willing to work can find jobs in non-governmental organizations and other institutions, where they can help others, as well as do something for themselves. HIV-infected persons may decide whether or not to disclose their status; no one is informed without their consent. There is no compulsory testing for admission to schools, for employment or for any kind of immigration or visa procedures.

Legislative policy is oriented towards solutions preventing any discrimination against persons living with HIV/AIDS. Except where blood donations, organ transplants, criminal proceedings and court warrants are concerned, Polish law does not permit HIV/AIDS diagnostic tests without consent or against a patient's will. HIV/AIDS data protection strictly requires that doctors and other hospital staff keep those cases confidential. Relevant regulations impose the strict obligation of treating all medical and official information as confidential.

The national programme supports the principle of full protection and promotion of human rights based on the inalienable dignity of an individual.

The issue of gender is fully reflected in the national programme. There are a number of education programmes carried out in schools, and they address girls and boys equally. There are also a number of non-governmental organizations assisting sex workers. Moreover, there are prevention activities and educational materials that take into account different needs according to gender and age.

Poland contributes significantly to the international community's efforts on the issue of human rights in the context of HIV and AIDS. Every two years since the beginning of the 1990s, Poland has introduced in the Commission on Human Rights a draft resolution on the protection of human rights in the context of HIV/AIDS.

Recognizing the importance of the family, youth-friendly information, sexual education, counselling services and cultural, religious and moral factors, our activities focus on society as a whole, with special attention to women of childbearing age and parents of adolescent children. Educational actions are aimed at shaping responsible attitudes towards one's health and at preventing situations that favour infection. Special attention is given to youth at schools and to the staff responsible for their education. Training is provided to the personnel responsible for the education of youth. Issues of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections are included in the standards for training teachers in the framework of pedagogical studies, qualification tests and postgraduate studies.

Let me point out in conclusion that the State leadership in my country brings together institutions and organizations at the central and local levels of administration, together with civil society. Legislative policy is oriented towards solutions preventing any discrimination against persons living with HIV/AIDS. Programmes for the prevention of epidemics in Poland are well developed. Through the preventive measures, medical treatment and social support provided by the national programme, the scale of the epidemic in Poland is relatively stable. However, in spite of that relatively stable situation, Poland recognizes that the region of Central and Eastern Europe actually has a very rapidly rising rate of infection, which could result in a rapid escalation of the epidemic throughout Europe.

The Polish Government will continue its efforts to ensure broader involvement in civil society for people living with HIV/AIDS, and to promote and protect their rights. We are open to sharing our experience in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and of other communicable diseases with our partners in the region, thus promoting cross-sectoral and transnational cooperation.

Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Scarcely a year ago, we held an urgent special session of the General Assembly to confront the problem of HIV/AIDS in all its aspects and to coordinate and intensify national, regional and international activities to combat the pandemic in an integrated way. At that time, 36.1 million people were living with HIV/AIDS, 90 per cent of them in developing countries and 75 per cent of them in sub-Saharan Africa. Currently, 40 million people are

infected with the virus. Of those, 3 million are children and 28.5 million live in sub-Saharan Africa.

It is true that HIV/AIDS affects all countries and peoples, rich and poor, without distinction, but it is also true that all do not have the same opportunities to attack and prevent the disease, and therein lies the difference. Today, millions of persons die of AIDS and other millions continue to be infected with the virus. More than 80 per cent of those deaths occur in Africa, where the majority of the millions affected by the epidemic have no access to the medicines or the therapies that are necessary to fight the disease, to prevent other opportunistic diseases and to relieve pain.

Developing countries — particularly those in Africa — have made a great effort and have created national anti-AIDS programmes. However, they cannot cope with the disease with the limited resources available to them — resources that they must use to pay their external debt or to achieve sustainable development. Today, Africa spends four times as much on servicing its external debt as on education and health combined.

World action against AIDS requires financial resources. According to the report of the Secretary-General (A/57/227 and Corr.1), the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria — created as a mechanism for financing additional resources — has to date received more than $2 million in pledged contributions and has approved subsidies for programmes in low- and medium-income countries totalling $616 million for a five-year period. Obviously, the world response falls far short of the goal of $10 billion in annual expenditures by 2005.

International cooperation is imperative. Only if developing countries receive special treatment, if they are guaranteed market access, if the deterioration in the prices of basic commodities ends, if their external debt is forgiven, if they are guaranteed access to technology, if official development assistance increases and if the necessary financial resources are allocated without interference and conditions — only in this way will the necessary resources to fight this disease be released.

My country, despite the fact that it is poor and has been subjected to an iron-fisted blockade for more than four decades, is developing an anti-AIDS programme that ensures integrated health care for both carriers and the sick — free anti-retroviral therapy for all who are ill and centres of specialized care for the cases that require it — and is fighting tirelessly for broader social integration of the sick and of carriers, with full rights and without discrimination. Also guaranteed is access to 100 per cent certified blood donations for AIDS, hepatitis and other illnesses. Voluntary tests of all those who are pregnant have resulted in a zero mother-to-child transmission rate since 1997, and we are implementing a prevention and education strategy directed at vulnerable groups, at young people and at the entire population. We have the lowest prevalence rate in the Americas and one of the lowest in the world, at 0.03 per cent of those between 15 and 49 years of age.

Despite the fact that Cuba has no access to 50 per cent of the new medicines produced in the world because they are formulated by pharmaceutical companies and produced by medical equipment manufacturers in the United States and by their subsidiaries in third countries, we have contained the epidemic and have achieved a life expectancy of more than 76 years and an infant mortality rate of 6.2.

Cuba wishes to share its modest experience. I should like to reiterate my Government's offer to help the brotherly African peoples in the fight against the HIV pandemic by sending 4,000 doctors and health care personnel to create the necessary infrastructure in order to provide the population with essential medicines, prescriptions and follow-up. Those personnel could train a great number of specialists, nurses and medical technicians. Cuba also offers to provide the necessary teachers to create 20 medical schools, many of whom could be chosen from among the 2,359 Cuban doctors who today are providing their services in 17 African countries as part of an integrated health programme. In such schools, thousands of doctors could be trained each year in the countries that need them most.

I wish to reiterate our offer of doctors, teachers, psychologists and other specialists who will be required to advise and coordinate prevention campaigns against AIDS and other illnesses. We can supply free medical equipment and diagnostic kits needed for basic prevention programmes in 17 countries. We are offering free anti-retroviral therapy for 30,000 patients. All we need is for the industrialized countries to provide the minimum resources to make all of that possible.

Mr. Atta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The holding of the twenty-sixth special session of the General Assembly, in June 2001, marked the high point of the Organization's concern over the problem of HIV/AIDS, whose toll on humanity over two decades is matched only by that of the Second World War. At the time, hopes were high that collective international effort was the only available way to help the countries most affected by this disease to confront it, within the framework of an integrated international plan that would take all the aspects of the disease into account, from prevention, care and treatment to other economic and social factors and results. Such were our hopes a year and a half ago. Today we meet to consider what the Secretary-General tells us in his report about the extent to which those hopes have been met.

The report shows that the international community remains unable to deal with the disease: effective prevention programmes cover only 20 per cent of those affected, and of the 34 million people infected with the virus, 86 per cent are in sub-Saharan Africa and in South-East Asia. Of that group only 60,000 are receiving the anti-retroviral therapy that can stop or delay the progress of the disease.

The gravest of the statistics is that of 40 million affected by HIV/AIDS less than 10 per cent receive treatment for this disease, which causes the body to collapse for lack of immunity. The report shows clearly that internationally the expenditure on combating AIDS is decreasing. It shows that despite the increase to $2.8 billion of expenditure in the low- and medium-income countries on AIDS programmes in 2002, international resources pledged to the Global Fund to Combat AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria since its establishment have amounted to some $2 billion. The total is one third of the amount required every year. The report says that the Fund has provided some $616 million for national programmes over the next five years. Analysis of the data shows that the Fund's Board has given only 32 per cent of the amounts required to finance national programmes, and that countries are not receiving the necessary financing immediately but over five years, whereas $400 million is needed over a period of two years. We have several questions regarding this analysis.

Is the slow pace of the Fund's work sufficient to cope with the tremendous speed of the spread of the disease? Have resources increased or decreased in comparison with those directed to the secondary channels that existed before the Fund was established? That is to say, has the establishment of the Fund increased international spending on the disease or is the Fund simply a forum to give specific direction to national programmes for combating the disease? Finally, where is the United Nations role in combating AIDS?

The Egyptian delegation believes that greater emphasis should be placed on the role of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. The Programme's position as an observer is not in line with that of other funds with longer experience and a track record in the field. The Egyptian delegation strongly supports the conclusion of the Secretary-General that the issue of HIV/AIDS should be integrated into programmes to combat poverty and promote sustainable development, and the call to substantially increase assistance to countries in need. The persistence of this humanitarian and social situation and the real suffering of the tens of millions who are infected with AIDS represent challenges to the human conscience. Mankind remains unable to mobilize the resources to combat the disease. The existence of the disease without a cure is saddening, but the fact that most people cannot afford the medicines that exist is a source of shame to humanity and is psychologically destructive. We cannot call on one hand for globalizing the economy and on the other for privatizing poverty and disease.

Mr. Zhang Yishan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation wishes to put on record its appreciation to the Secretary-General for the report (A/57/227) submitted under this agenda item and for the recommendations it contains.

Over the past two decades, the scourge of HIV/AIDS has been spreading unchecked around the world, resulting in more than 40 million infections and more than 21 million deaths. It is projected that an additional 45 million people will be infected between 2002 and 2010. HIV/AIDS poses a great challenge to social development, economic growth and political stability worldwide and, indeed to the safety and survival of humankind.

As a global crisis, HIV/AIDS requires a concerted response through global action. Addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic was high on the agenda of a whole series of major conferences, including the Millennium Summit, the World Summit for Social

Development and the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

At its twenty-sixth special session, on HIV/AIDS, held last year, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (resolution S26/2), setting out the goals, tasks and responsibilities in the international fight against the epidemic. The Declaration has become an important document guiding our struggle against HIV/AIDS.

Many countries have developed national prevention strategies in line with the Declaration. International organizations, governmental bodies and civil society have adopted a series of positive measures in the fields of legislation, mobilization of resources, extensive provision of drugs for prevention and treatment, and increase of public awareness.

What merits particular mention is that the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which was established only at the beginning of the year, has attracted over $2 billion in pledges and has approved the disbursement of $616 million in funds to low- and middle-income countries over the next 5 years. Nonetheless, that figure is still a far cry from the target of $10 billion per year by 2005.

We still have a long way to go in combating HIV/AIDS. As the Secretary-General points out in his report, due to ineffective implementation, inadequate funding and a shortage of medical supplies, progress in stemming the epidemic lags far behind its unrelenting advance and destructive trend. In that connection I wish to make a few observations on international cooperation on HIV/AIDS.

First, prevention and treatment should go hand in hand in an effective struggle against HIV/AIDS. While prevention is fundamental, treatment is the key. We should therefore take a two-pronged approach by making a concerted effort to reach the targets and implement the tasks set forth in the Declaration for 2003 and 2005. These include formulating national strategies for combating HIV/AIDS, incorporating them into national development plans and poverty eradication programmes, setting out clear goals and taking measures for prevention and treatment, raising public awareness, strengthening health care systems and ensuring that monitoring and enforcement take place.

Secondly, we must mobilize financial resources and provide access to drugs in fighting HIV/AIDS. In his report, the Secretary-General points out that funding for international cooperation in the fight against HIV/AIDS should grow by at least 50 per cent annually in order to meet the annual requirement of $10 billion by 2005, and that only a small fraction of the world's 40 million people living with HIV/AIDS have access to treatment due to patent-related problems and the high cost of related drugs.

It is our hope that the United Nations and its relevant specialized agencies, funds and development programmes, UNAIDS in particular, will play an active and leading role in enhancing cooperation between Governments and the private sector, exploring both traditional and innovative means of mobilizing financial resources and making HIV-related drugs widely available, so that poor populations in developing countries who are afflicted with HIV/AIDS are given access to these drugs. This will help effectively to resolve one of the major problems in our fight against HIV/AIDS and benefit people living with the epidemic.

Thirdly, research and development should be promoted in order to bring HIV/AIDS under control. It is essential to develop HIV-related vaccines as a means of eventually bringing HIV/AIDS under control. We hope that this issue will receive adequate attention as part and parcel of the global strategy in that respect. To this end, it is imperative to increase investment in, and speed up the development of, HIV-related vaccines; build up the research and development capability of all countries, particularly those of developing countries and those with high infection rates; carry out international cooperation; increase the transfer of relevant technologies; and establish mechanisms for regular exchange.

The fight against HIV/AIDS has received great attention from the Chinese Government, which formulated and started implementing an AIDS strategy in 1998. Our budget for combating HIV/AIDS registered a five- to seven-fold increase in 2001. We have also invested 1.2 billion yuan renminbi to improve our blood-collection and supply facilities. In addition, following the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS last year, China convened its first national conference on that subject and co-sponsored a regional seminar for Asia and the Pacific under the Global Fund. In this endeavour, UNAIDS

provided China with great support, for which we wish to record our gratitude.

As a country with a huge population, China faces special difficulties in preventing and controlling HIV/AIDS. We are prepared to continue our cooperation with the countries and international agencies concerned in such areas as financing; developing prevention and treatment projects; lowering drug prices; and further leveraging the advantage of traditional Chinese medicine in treatment in a bid to contribute to the fight against the epidemic in China and around the globe.

Mr. Abdul Ghafor (Brunei Darussalam): I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.

Realizing the serious socio-economic consequences that the HIV/AIDS pandemic could have for every member of this Assembly, we succeeded in adopting a Declaration of Commitment during the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS held in June last year. Our leaders pledged to enhance the coordination and intensification of national, regional and international efforts to combat HIV/AIDS in a comprehensive manner. We are pleased to note that these commitments have been translated into many encouraging developments in our continuing efforts to fight HIV/AIDS.

At the regional level, ASEAN's efforts started about a decade ago, when our ASEAN leaders met during the fourth ASEAN Summit in Singapore in 1992. HIV/AIDS was considered a threat of regional concern, and our ASEAN leaders agreed to make a coordinated effort to curb its spread. An ASEAN Task Force on AIDS was established in 1993 to strengthen regional coordination, build regional capacity and address cross- border issues. With the assistance of the World Health Organization, ASEAN member States were able to develop the ASEAN Regional Programme on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control for the period 1995-2000.

Our ASEAN leaders continued to strengthen their commitment to intensify efforts to combat HIV/AIDS when they met during the seventh ASEAN Summit in Brunei Darussalam in November last year — just five months after the special session. A Declaration on HIV/AIDS was adopted, and the leaders also endorsed the Second ASEAN Work Programme on HIV/AIDS for the period 2002-2005 to implement the provisions contained in the Declaration. Both the Declaration and the Work Programme were the result of extensive consultations with the affected communities, including those living with HIV/AIDS. It covers not only the health sector but all those related to HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS is now a national and regional priority in South-east Asia. ASEAN continues to strengthen its efforts, including in areas related to regional networking; access to drugs for people living with AIDS; mobile communities; inter-sectoral collaboration; research; improving HIV/AIDS surveillance; education and awareness programmes for young people and drug users; and other areas, to reduce vulnerability to HIV/AIDS transmission and to ensure the provision of care and support for people living with AIDS.

I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the implementation of the Second ASEAN Work Programme is now well under way, with the holding of various projects and activities related to joint actions to increase the affordability of drugs and testing reagents; mainstreaming HIV/AIDS into the development agenda; inter-country activities on mobile populations; and the ASEAN AIDS Information and Research Reference Network.

We would like to express our appreciation to UNAIDS for its continued and invaluable support for our regional efforts. We are also pleased to see that bodies of the United Nations system such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and others such as the World Health Organization and the World Bank are actively incorporating the issue of HIV/AIDS in their development, technical and funding programmes.

We look forward to strengthening cooperation with our dialogue partners and other international agencies in realizing our collective goals. In addition, we welcome the convening of the 15th International Conference on AIDS, which will be held in our region, hosted by Thailand, from 11 to 16 July 2004, and we

look forward to active participation and contributions by all concerned.

It is clear that HIV/AIDS will remain one of the most serious social and economic problems to confront us in the coming decades. It is in our best interests, therefore, that we resolve to prevent the further spread of the disease and to continue our fervent search for a cure. In that context, we in ASEAN reaffirm our commitment to do our utmost, individually and collectively, in addressing HIV/AIDS and supporting greater action and collaboration by the many stakeholders in tackling the pandemic.

Mr. De Alba (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on progress towards implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, as well as for his personal commitment to combating that epidemic, which is already considered to be the worst in the history of humankind.

We also express our appreciation to the secretariat of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and in particular to its Executive Director.

My delegation supports the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report with regard to the redoubled efforts that the United Nations will have to make in order to attain the objectives set out in the Declaration of Commitment.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has become a global emergency that threatens the security and development of all countries, not just those located in the worst affected regions. This emergency will require an energetic response based on collective action by countries through international cooperation.

The Secretary-General's report presents us with the stark fact that 40 million people worldwide are living with HIV/AIDS, and the statistics show that the situation is worsening. According to information from UNAIDS, the social and economic consequences of the epidemic manifest themselves most dramatically approximately 10 years after HIV appears in each country or region. Taking into account the fact that there are 5 million estimated new infections each year, the cost for the world will be enormous, even if the epidemic is quickly brought under control.

In sub-Saharan Africa and South and South-East Asia, regions that are home to more than 34 million of those affected by HIV/AIDS — 86 per cent of the world total — only some 60,000 people are receiving anti-retroviral therapy. If we do not significantly bolster the global response to HIV/AIDS, it has been estimated that between 2002 and 2010 there will be 45 million new infections. If, on the other hand, available preventative measures were extended with a view to combating the epidemic, we could avoid 28 million such infections.

UNAIDS has also reminded us of the enormous funding challenges that we must overcome. We must move from the $2.8 billion that will probably be devoted to combating the epidemic in 2002 to $10.5 billion per year from 2005 and $15 billion per year from 2007.

Despite the enormous challenges that we face in the short, medium and long term, the report of the Secretary-General also provides us with encouraging information. First, the report emphasizes that the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS was a watershed in our joint efforts to control this global scourge. Secondly, it highlights the fact that over the past 16 months, enormous progress has been made, both in mobilizing human and financial resources and in designing strategies and cooperation programmes.

The Government of Mexico reaffirms its support for the principles of the Millennium Declaration, the UNAIDS Framework for Global Leadership and the joint strategic plan of UNAIDS and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Strengthening them will help to strengthen global security.

Mexico actively participated in the special session on HIV/AIDS, and put forward proposals to deal with the impact of AIDS on women's health, to reduce the vulnerability of young people to the disease and to provide special care for orphaned children. It has also promoted respect for the human rights of people who are infected, with a view to preventing discrimination and stigmatization.

For the Mexican Government, the epidemic is a serious public health problem with social, economic and political consequences. Accordingly, combating it is a priority that must involve the public and private sector, specialists and educational institutions, civil society organizations, individuals and communities. In accordance with the recommendations made at the special session of the General Assembly, Mexico, through its Health Secretariat, has adopted a programme of action for the prevention and control of

HIV/AIDS for the period 2001-2006. The Government of Mexico is giving priority to, first, education strategies and preventive measures; secondly, policies aimed at the prevention of perinatal HIV/AIDS; thirdly, access to information and treatment to prevent perinatal transmission of HIV and syphilis; fourthly, discounted prices for anti-retroviral drugs; fifthly, the establishment of mechanisms to penalize individuals, businesses and institutions that violate the provisions of Mexican regulations for the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS; and sixthly, campaigns to combat discrimination against people infected with the virus.

Mexico recognizes the importance of the international community's strengthening and intensifying its cooperation with and technical assistance for countries with a high incidence of HIV/AIDS and few resources. Mexico therefore supports multisectoral, regional and international cooperation as a fundamental element in the global response to the pandemic. In this context, we have worked actively with the countries of Central America and the Caribbean to prevent and control HIV/AIDS. In a collaborative effort with the ministers for health of the region, important activities have been carried out in the framework of the Central American cooperation programme for 2001-2002, through a project to strengthen the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, with special attention to the migrant population.

Furthermore, in June 2002, an intensive course entitled "HIV/AIDS: Watchfulness, Prevention and Care", was held in Mexico, organized by the National Institute for Public Health. That course was attended by specialists from seven countries of the Central American region, as well as by Spanish- and French-speaking Caribbean countries.

My delegation believes that the eradication of AIDS would benefit the entire world, and funding and cooperation to combat this scourge must therefore occupy a priority position in the policies of multilateral bodies, bilateral donors and private foundations.

The Government of Mexico believes that the AIDS pandemic has very grave implications for international security. The immediate future of the world will depend on the capacity of the United Nations to deal with it.

Mr. Singh (India): We thank the Secretary-General for his report on progress towards implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (A/57/227). The report is fair and balanced, as well as useful.

The report states that the Declaration of Commitment established, "for the first time ever, time-bound targets to which Governments and the United Nations may be held accountable". The purpose of today's debate is to consider the report with the objective of taking stock of progress achieved in realizing the commitments set out in the Declaration, with a view to identifying problems and constraints and making recommendations on actions needed to make further progress. Such actions would, in our view, also include measures required for the further refinement of the mechanisms used for measuring progress.

The Secretary-General's report arrives at the conclusion that, in the absence of a substantial strengthening of the global response to HIV/AIDS, 45 million new infections are projected to occur between 2002 and 2010. It bases this conclusion on the finding that only 15 per cent or so of the people at risk of HIV infection have access to basic protective services, that only 4 per cent of people in low- and middle-income countries who qualify for anti-retroviral therapy obtain it and that even the coverage for preventing mother-to-child transmission is only 10 per cent.

The report finds that the political commitment to implement the Declaration of Commitment continues to increase and that spending on HIV/AIDS in low- and middle-income countries increased by more than 50 per cent in this year alone. It, however, also points out that the implementation of national AIDS strategies is slow, in large measure owing to lack of resources. According to the report, only 60,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa, South and South-East Asia receive anti-retroviral therapy. The high cost of anti-retroviral drugs is cited as the principal barrier to care. The report finds further that debt repayment has, in many cases, impeded the capacity of countries to allocate sufficient resources to fight HIV/AIDS.

The Declaration of Commitment was unambiguous in asserting that the HIV/AIDS challenge cannot be met without new and sustained additional resources. This led to the establishment of a Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, to finance an urgent and expanded response. We are

pleased that the Fund has approved grants for projects totalling $616 million for the next five years. We understand, however, that the Fund has found additional certain projects meritorious and has, in principle, approved them, totalling a much larger quantum of money. The shortfall in international resources to finance these projects is estimated to be $2 billion for 2003. For 2004, the figure is $4.6 billion.

In our view, it is important to diligently track progress towards the fulfilment of the commitments that we have undertaken. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), along with its co-sponsors, have developed core indicators for monitoring such progress. These indicators will measure, at the country level, the percentage of HIV-infected pregnant women receiving the complete course of anti-retroviral prophylaxis, the percentage of people with advanced HIV infection receiving anti-retroviral combination therapy and the percentage of people with sexually transmitted diseases who have been appropriately diagnosed, treated and counselled. The indicators will, however, not measure commitment at the country level to international development assistance for combating HIV/AIDS.

The Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS was not adopted in a meeting of the Group of 77. It was adopted by a special session of the United Nations General Assembly and represents, we think, a global compact bringing together all Member States, both developed and developing. It is clear from the report that the compact will remain unfulfilled unless commitments are met by all parties, both developed and developing. In order for there to be any meaningful tracking of progress, we call on UNAIDS to further refine the mechanisms that it proposes to use for this purpose.

India, despite its resource constraints, has been doing its share as a responsible member of the international community. The role played by its pharmaceutical industry has been responsible for the reduction in the cost of anti-retrovirals by 85 to 90 per cent in most developing countries. The World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Declaration of November 2001, which clarified that the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement) could and should be interpreted in a manner supportive of the right of Member States to protect public health and promote access to medicines, represents some movement on the part of our development partners as well. India is now working on what could become a fairly substantive contribution to the prevention of HIV/AIDS. There is on-going research in India, both original and collaborative, in the area of vaccine development. Recent breakthroughs in genomics and related areas offer possibilities. We are focusing on the C subtype of the HIV virus, which is prevalent in India and some other developing countries. We have already, through biotechnology research, made a breakthrough in HIV diagnostic kits. Two of them, in particular, have been successful in India and many other countries. We would be happy to share these technologies.

I will now say a few words about our national programme. We have had, since 1992, a National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS. The second phase of the National AIDS Control Programme, initiated in 1994, is a multisectoral programme aimed at reducing the spread of infection and strengthening capacity to respond to the spread of the disease on a long-term basis. Our strong political commitment, which cuts across party lines, is evidenced by the establishment of a parliamentary forum on HIV/AIDS prevention. Over 700 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are involved in the implementation of targeted intervention projects for high-risk groups. We make extensive use of the electronic and print media to disseminate HIV/AIDS messages in all the languages used in our country. India's health system provides free treatment for opportunistic infections in HIV-positive persons. A programme to prevent mother-to-child transmission is also being implemented. Adolescent information needs are being addressed through a school aids programme. In addition to programmes for raising general awareness regarding safe sex, there are specific programmes that focus on sex workers, men who have sex with men, street children, injecting drug users and migrant workers. Special emphasis is placed on the right to privacy of individuals who are vulnerable to or affected by HIV/AIDS. We hope, with these efforts, to achieve our time-bound national targets, which are consistent with those contained in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.

A variety of strategies is required to address both the preventive aspects and the care and support aspects of HIV/AIDS. What is required is to fulfil the commitments undertaken by the international community as a whole, developed and developing alike, in the special session on HIV/AIDS. We need to

monitor progress towards the fulfilment of those commitments.

Mr. Ivanov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, the delegation of Belarus wishes to express its gratitude to the Secretary-General for his report on the subject before us today. We believe that the report is an important source of information on how the international community should act to combat the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in order to achieve the indicators agreed upon at the twenty-sixth special session of the General Assembly. Belarus had the honour of making a practical contribution to the preparation of the Secretary-General's report by providing detailed information for the corresponding questionnaire.

With the adoption of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, we agreed that the measure of our success should lie in responsible coordinated action at all levels — national, regional and global. In that connection, we should like to briefly address some practical steps that are being taken by the President, Government and civil society of Belarus to fulfil the provisions of the decisions taken at the twenty-sixth special session.

With regard to leadership, Belarus has developed a State programme for the prevention of HIV infection for the period 2001-2005, as well as a strategic plan for forward-looking measures to prevent the expansion of the epidemic from the period 2001 to 2003. Those strategies provide for a number of measures in terms of organizational, legal, preventive and rehabilitation measures among various groups of highly vulnerable populations. They include the organization of activities for the prevention of HIV infection for drug users and the development within educational institutions of programmes on healthy living, including prevention of HIV infection and publicizing the use of contraceptives among young people, spreading prevention information throughout institutions that provide assistance to people with AIDS and planning programmes for people at high risk of infection. Action in those areas involves the participation of different sectors of society, including non-governmental organizations, ministries and departments.

Regarding care, support and treatment, the State programme for AIDS prevention provides for the free provision of anti-retroviral drugs to HIV-positive persons at medical institutions, as well as distribution through pharmacy networks. At the same time, research shows that our country is currently encountering difficulties in providing a multi-component HIV-infection therapy, largely because of the limited number of authorized medicines and because of their high cost. Work is therefore being done to introduce mechanisms that will make it possible to develop local production, in keeping with international standards. With a view to expanding opportunities for HIV-infection therapy, Belarus is providing a local product called Zametcit. Use of that local product will make it possible to reduce costs and ensure greater access. We are currently considering the issue of simplifying the registration procedure for imported anti-retroviral preparations, which will expand the list of medicines that can be used.

Regarding HIV/AIDS and human rights, people with HIV/AIDS are guaranteed the rights of all citizens, as set out in the Constitution of Belarus. Moreover, there is a set of legislative acts that reflects different aspects of the HIV/AIDS problem. Discrimination is prohibited, the interests and rights of HIV-infected persons are guaranteed, the principle of confidentiality is assured and the rights and legitimate interests of relatives may not be infringed upon.

As to research and development, we have elaborated a national system for monitoring HIV infection, including through the study of the scope of HIV infection among risk groups. We have introduced computer-based standard systems of accountability. HIV/AIDS-related issues are included in programmes for medical workers and specialized training is provided. Training of sociologists working on HIV/AIDS-related research is carried out at seminars involving international consultants. The training of specialists working with groups at risk is being conducted at national and international seminars and training sessions.

One of the main obstacles to carrying out those measures at the national level is the lack of resources and technical potential; we fully agree with the Secretary-General's conclusion on that point. Approaching its obligations responsibly, Belarus, nevertheless, is not now in a position to greatly increase the volume of financing for corresponding State programmes. That is due to the transitional nature of our economy, which is experiencing difficult social and economic changes. The situation is also particularly difficult for our country because of the fact

that the HIV/AIDS problem is not just a national problem but, to a considerable extent, an imported one. It is very closely linked to dangerous phenomena such as illegal drug traffic and illegal migration. Here we look for the support and understanding of the international community. Such support appears to us to be fully justified because, as can be seen from the recent report of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the Eastern European region, to which our country belongs, unfortunately has the highest current rate of increase in infection.

Belarus has initiated practical cooperation with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, with a view to mobilizing international support for its own efforts. We also greatly appreciate our interaction with the World Bank in combating the spread of HIV/AIDS in Belarus.

In conclusion, allow me to express my country's conviction that the support of a dedicated, coordinated and comprehensive international approach to combating HIV/AIDS will enable us to achieve progress with a view to attaining the objectives on which we have agreed.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern Europe countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, as well as the European Free Trade Association country member of the European Economic Area, Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

At the Millennium Summit, our heads of State or Government resolved by 2015 to have halted and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, the scourge of malaria and other major diseases that afflict humanity. This commitment was followed up last year in June when we all met at the special session and adopted the United Nations Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. The Declaration sets out a number of concrete and time-bound goals, which constitute an important framework for our actions in the global fight against HIV/AIDS. But it is after all just a Declaration; our true commitment must be shown through our joint actions. We have a great challenge in translating political commitment into action.

The consequences of the epidemic are alarming. In 2001, 5 million people became infected with HIV and 3 million died from AIDS. Today, more than 40 million are living with HIV/AIDS. The disease has a major impact — and in some areas, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, a devastating one — on life. However, it is also expanding rapidly in other regions of the world, which, unless early action is taken, threaten to be engulfed by the epidemic. It halts social and economic development; thousands of children are left as orphans; and it contributes to a shortage of food, a slowing in production and lower education standards.

There is an urgent need for a strengthened effort to fight HIV/AIDS. The response required is more complex than that to other diseases. It requires action through all aspects of society, not just health. Our efforts to fight HIV/AIDS must therefore be an integral part of our work in all fields — in relation to education, agriculture, industrial development, trade, human rights and social development. It is a true cross-cutting issue and must be treated accordingly.

Many countries have developed multisectoral plans and strategies for combating HIV/AIDS, but the concrete responses to the epidemic often remain enclosed in health ministries. This must be changed. The epidemic should be counteracted through a broad set of interventions. The capacity to coordinate a wide range of initiatives must be enhanced. Taking into account the multisectoral nature of the problem, the need to ensure ownership of national Governments and the proper coordination as well as cooperation of the various actors, all HIV/AIDS activities should be integrated into national poverty reduction programmes, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.

The report of the Secretary-General rightly underlines the crucial importance of national leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS. We must speak openly about HIV/AIDS and confront stigmatization and discrimination. Sexual health education for young persons is part of such openness, as is recognizing the gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS and the importance of the active involvement of men and boys in prevention efforts. Only by doing so can we achieve the maximum impact of our efforts.

Civil society forms an intrinsic part of a national response. It is imperative that we complement political leadership with the full and active participation of civil society, including people living with HIV/AIDS, as

well as the private sector. This is indeed happening in many countries. However, in the global perspective participation remains inadequate. The EU would like to acknowledge and support the role played by civil society through participation in planning exercises, in providing care and support to orphans and other vulnerable groups, and in monitoring HIV-related human rights violations.

Last year, United Nations Member States at the General Assembly special session on HIV/AIDS agreed that by 2005 we would mobilize in total between $7 and $10 billion a year to fight the epidemic. The establishment of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria provides an important global financial mechanism for securing the necessary resources for the fight against the three diseases. The EU is committed to helping the Global Fund establish itself as an effective mechanism for the delivery of essential support to those most in need.

In Monterrey, we agreed to increase the resources for development — both domestic resources and assistance from the international community — and to enhance aid effectiveness. This should include prioritizing interventions that are known to be effective in responding to HIV/AIDS. We must increase spending in health and education if we are to achieve by 2015 the goal of halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS. An increase in official development assistance and the speedy and effective implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative will, among other things, be targeted towards the social sector and contribute to freeing domestic resources for social sector investment.

But lack of financial resources is not the only obstacle. Human capacity, especially at the country level, is stretched beyond its limits. Indeed, we are now reaching the point where the extent to which HIV/AIDS is contributing to the erosion of human capacity to respond to the disease must be acknowledged. External assistance often supports specific interventions but pays less attention to the challenge of building sufficient capacity at the local level in order to sustain these activities over the long term. In a situation of insufficient capacity, the scaling-up of successful pilot projects, which could increase efforts aimed at combating HIV/AIDS, may not yield sustainable results.

The United Nations system must address this challenge through strengthened inter-agency collaboration, especially at the country level, with a view to ensuring the most effective utilization of its resources. The effectiveness of strategies to combat HIV/AIDS depends very much on improved coordination and coherence between all stakeholders at the global, regional, national and local levels. In this context, the EU welcomes the ongoing evaluation of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). The EU very much looks forward to the debate on the findings of the evaluation at the Programme Coordinating Board of UNAIDS, to be held in Portugal in December this year. Further consideration in order to strengthen the mandate of UNAIDS might be called for by the Economic and Social Council.

The EU stands ready to intensify its efforts, also through the United Nations system — and above all UNAIDS — aimed at eliminating the scourge of HIV/AIDS. We would like to stress the important role that UNAIDS plays in coordinating the United Nations response to HIV/AIDS. We would like to reaffirm the importance we attach to an enhanced but balanced approach in order to address all dimensions of the epidemic. Prevention must be the mainstay of our response. Prevention and treatment are complementary in a fundamental way and care, support and treatment together are closely linked to effective prevention. We underscore the need to develop national and sectoral policies and plans, in which reproductive health care and services, and population — including focusing on adolescents — and gender issues are integrated, along with the need to strengthen primary health care systems and community-based care.

The EU is working actively to increase access to and affordability of key pharmaceuticals and to promote research into and development of new global public goods to confront HIV/AIDS. The EU Action Plan on aid for poverty diseases in developing countries provides a comprehensive package of interventions for the three major communicable diseases — HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria — and includes actions at all levels related to development, trade and research in order to improve health conditions and access to medicines.

In conclusion, we agree with the Secretary-General that the United Nations is a unique instrument available to the world for dealing with critical global

issues, such as the fight against HIV/AIDS. We would also in this context like to highlight the importance we attach to the Secretary-General's initiative to strengthen the United Nations. Thus, we have to point out the need to ensure coherence between the follow-up to the special session on HIV/AIDS, the Millennium Declaration and other major United Nations conferences and summits. We must also take a holistic approach to the monitoring and evaluation of our efforts in relation to HIV/AIDS, and find a way to involve all stakeholders, including civil society, in our deliberations.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker on the list for this meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.05 p.m.